THE GENERA *LAMIA* F., *MESOSA* LATR. AND *LEIOPUS* SERV., (COL.: LAMIIDAE) IN THE BRITISH ISLES

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Introduction

THESE three species, describing the first of our very short list of native Lamiids, comprise one of our rarest Coleoptera, last seen nearly four decades ago, a very scarce local Longhorn, and lastly, one of the most attractive and fortunately still common examples of the family; the latter two beetles were known to and figured by Martyn (1792).

County and vice-county symbols are explained in Kaufmann (1989): italicised letters indicate a widely spread insect and those in brackets still require confirmatory records.

Lamia textor L.

A very local and extremely scarce Longhorn, the largest specimens of which may measure some 3cm long, *L. textor,* the Weaver Beetle, now on the vulnerable list (Shirt, 1987), has (or had) a widely scattered distribution largely confined to the south of England, two western, and a very few other counties in the remainder of the British Isles, about some records from which, it is felt, there are lingering doubts (Speight, 1988).

ENGLAND: CB (EK) EX GW NS *SH* WW
WALES: MN
SCOTLAND: AM PM
IRELAND: NK

Several examples of this handsome beetle were last captured in mid-Scotland in the early 1950s, *teste* Dr P. Hyman: whether or not it should be regarded as another relict species of the ancient Caledonian forest is debatable.

Skidmore & Johnson (1967) in their Merioneth list record what were identified as *Lamia* borings in willow trees from several localities; that these galleries were indeed made by this beetle has since been confirmed by one of the co-authors of the Merioneth paper (P. Skidmore *in litt.*, who added that the sites and workings were difficult to locate). The last record of the capture of *Lamia* in Wales dates back to the beginning of the century (Jackson, 1904).

L. textor continues to be illustrated in a number of popular entomological books; the likelihood of finding it is matched only by the rarity of the beetle itself.

The destructive larva infests the healthy undeveloped roots, branches and trunks (but no higher than two metres up) of both young trees and the moist decaying boles of aspen, birch, creeping willow, grey willow, osier beds, in which it causes considerable damage (Chinery, 1986), black and

variegated poplar — only occasionally — pussy willow and weeping willow. The larval tunnels are more often than not confined to the roots, and as the beetle frequents marshy, even boggy woodlands, sometimes difficult to penetrate, its larval depredations may go undetected. Its only predator is the Ichneumon, *Ephialtes messor* Grav.

Pupation takes place in spring or even earlier within a cell formed inside the pith wood of the roots or the base of the brood plant. Metamorphosis lasts from two to four years.

The imagines emerge as early as March, continuing until October, the main months of eclosion being June and July. Rather than bite through a fresh exit hole, when several adults eclode at much the same time, they will use the same tunnel and egress already opened up by a preceding beetle, a peculiarity which helps to mask the little evidence of *Lamia*'s presence above ground.

The beetle is known to nibble the leaves of its host tree, but it is rarely seen in daylight as it sits motionless, camouflaged by its dull coloration, on the protruding roots or branches of its favourite pabula, willows and sallows. As night approaches, these secretive beetles become more active, crawling quietly through the long damp grass stems of their surroundings.

Their reticence has not protected them: provincial museum collections contain quite long series of these interesting beetles, collected in earlier times when *Lamia,* much sought after, appeared to be more common, such that, for instance, in two favoured habitats around Bath and in the Clifton Woods near Bristol, they were soon reduced in numbers. The beetle is omitted from the main Gloucestershire list (Atty, 1983) but is reinstated as occurring once in 1857 in the Appendix on the Bristol fauna. Towards the end of last century, except in the above-named areas, *Lamia* was already regarded as rare (Fowler, 1890). Over-collection probably happened, too, in other rather isolated localities where the insect was formerly known to occur.

Modern farming methods, the draining of marshland and the uprooting of *Salix* scrub have almost certainly contributed to the continued decline of this strange endangered species.

Mesosa nebulosa F.

A very uncommon and scarce beetle with a range confined to the English counties below a line roughly south of the R. Wye to the Wash; its distribution is westerly on the one side and easterly on the other, linked by the Thames and Severn basins.

ENGLAND: BK CB EK ES GE GW HF HU MM NE SE *SH* SR WK WO

The polyphagous larva is found almost exclusively in the dead upper branches of alder, aspen, beech, birch, buckthorn, crabapple, elm, false acacia, hawthorn, hazel, holly, hornbeam, horsechestnut, lime, oak (especially), old orchard trees, poplar, walnut, wild cherry and willow.

The larvae are parasitised by these Ichneumonids and Braconids:— *Ephialtes messor* Grav., *Helcon annulicornis* Nees, *Pyracmon melanurus* Holmgr. and *Xorides irrigator* F.

Pupation takes place in mid-summer, the adults ecloding during July and August; they do not, however, emerge into the open but overwinter until the following year when they occur from as early as March until August. Metamorphosis takes from two to three years to complete.

Mesosa, nonetheless, is very difficult to find and is often inaccessible because it rarely descends from the topmost branches of its host tree. Specimens are most likely to be obtained by chiselling them out from storm-scattered broken off dead pieces of thick twigs and the smaller branches of trees lying on the ground.

This insect is evidently not a floricole.

Leiopus nebulosus L.

This pretty little Longhorn is generally distributed and locally common throughout the British Isles.

ENGLAND: BD BK BX CB *CH CU* DM *DT* DY EC *EK EN ES EX EY GE* GW HF *HT* HU IW L *LR MX MY* ND NE NH *NM NO* NS NW NY *OX SD* SE SH SL SN (SP) *SR* SS *ST* SY *WK* WL WN WO WS *WW WX* WY

WALES: BR DB CR GM MG *MN* PB RA

SCOTLAND: AM AS *BW* DF DN *ED* EI EL KB LA LL M PM SG WI WT

IRELAND: AN CL KK NG NK (NT) QC RO WA WC WI

The amphixylophagous larva is found infesting the dead branches and sometimes the stumps and standing decaying timber of the following:— alder, apple, ash, *Baccharis,* beech, birch, crabapple, *Cydonia,* dogrose, elm, false acacia, hawthorn, hazel, holly, hornbeam, horsechestnut, larch, laurel, maple, various orchard trees, pear, *Prunus acuparia, P. armenica, P. communis, P. persica,* Scots pine, spruce, walnut and willow.

The larvae are host to almost a score of parasitic Hymenoptera; these are:— *Cenocoelius agriculator* L., *C. canalis* Nees, *Deuteroxorides albitarsus* Grav., *D. igneus* Ratz., *D. imperator* Ratz., *Doryctes pomarius* Reinb., *Ephialtes tuberculatus* Fourc., *Habrobracon palpebrator* Ratz., Habrocytus dahlbomi Ratz., *Helcon carinator* Nees, *H. tardator* Nees, *Iphiaulax impostor* Scop., *Ischnocerus seticornis* Kr., *Meteorus tabidus* Ws., *Orthocentrus fulvipes* Gr., *Phaegaduon detestator* Thunb., *Xorides brachylabris* Kriechb., *X. filiformis* Grav., *X. indicatorius* Latr., *X. praecatorius* F., and *X. securiformis* F.

Pupation normally takes place in late spring during April and May; occasionally, however, when the life cycle is prolonged from its customary annual duration into a second year, the adults will overwinter in the host tree.

The imagines are nearly always found resting from April until August on the parent plant whence they may be simply captured by tapping the dead branches. Although they take to the wing in summer, they are not blossom seeking insects, but they are sometimes found on *Angelica* and dead nettle, and they may be swept off old palings and dead hedgerows.

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Butterflies in the Woolwich (S.E. London) district, 1990.

For several years now I have tended to feel, at the end of each season, that it has been even worse for butterflies in my district than the one preceding; with, doubtless, an occasional bright spot here and there to relieve the prevailing gloom (rendered still more profound by contrast with frequent glowing reports from other parts of the country). The present season has in some respects continued this downward trend; despite the long-lasting fine hot weather from spring to autumn, which one might have hoped would bring about an abundance of almost all the species that could have been expected in the old days. On the contrary, we have had here a surprisingly poor showing of *C. argiolus* (Holly Blue) — hardly more than sporadic throughout — and a total absence of all the autumn Vanessids hard to account for. The autumn brood of *P. aegeria* (Speckled Wood) failed to materialise, possibly a direct result of the drought — here long and severe. Nor was the promise of increase offered in 1989 by two sightings (one doubtful) of *L. megera* (Wall) realised in 1990, none being seen.

So much for the gloom — now for the bright spots. In strange contrast to *argiolus*, *P. icarus* (Common Blue), which has hardly lived up to its